

The Mercury News

Thursday, October 10, 2002

Bay Area standing apart on Iraq vote MOST LOCAL LAWMAKERS TO REJECT USE OF FORCE

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WASHINGTON - The House of Representatives is poised today to overwhelmingly authorize President Bush to use military force against Iraq, with the Senate likely to follow by week's end. Just as with the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Bay Area representatives will stand out for their almost-unanimous opposition.

Ten of the region's 13 House members -- all Democrats -- will vote against the White House resolution. Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., who lives in Marin County, also plans to oppose it. She could be joined by Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., the former mayor of San Francisco, who is undecided but has been critical of Bush's approach to Iraq.

Their reasons for opposing the president's request to use force if necessary to disarm Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein range from general opposition to military actions to specific concerns about attacking Iraq without hard evidence of an imminent threat or strong international support.

"The president has not answered the haunting questions of thousands of my constituents and the American people," Rep. Anna Eshoo, D-Palo Alto, said Wednesday during the House debate. "Why now? How many troops are needed to wage this war? What will it cost? How long will we be there? What is the plan to manage the chaos in the aftermath of 'regime change'? And finally, how will this affect the war on terrorism?"

In forming an almost-united front against Bush's plans for a possible unilateral, pre-emptive war against Iraq, the Bay Area's congressional representatives -- all but one a Democrat -- reflect the region's largely liberal populace, lawmakers and political analysts said. It is also a region that has a long anti-war tradition and is a continent removed from the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the East Coast.

Rep. Mike Honda, D-San Jose, said the diversity of the region's population is an additional factor in its qualms about war with Iraq.

"We're pretty multiethnic and multilingual, and we've practiced working together," said Honda, who like many of his colleagues is opposing Bush's request in part because the White House has not secured international backing. "I think we have a better global insight into how to approach a particular issue like the one we're facing today."

Bay Area Democrats find themselves much more isolated in opposition to war than they were in 1991, when a resolution authorizing force to end Iraq's invasion of Kuwait narrowly passed the House of Representatives and squeaked through the Senate by only five votes. Only about 100 of the 435 members of the House of Representatives are expected to oppose the White House resolution this time, along with fewer than a third of the 100 senators.

Unlike in 1991, many top Democrats are backing the president, including House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt of Missouri and, apparently, Sen. Majority Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D., who said earlier this week he was "inclined to support" the White House resolution. Daschle angered some in his party Wednesday by vowing to press through stalling tactics by Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., to ensure a vote this week.

"On this issue more than on most, the Bay Area is on the fringes of the Democratic Party," said Bruce Cain, a political scientist at the University of California-Berkeley.

Still, the region's delegation is not monolithic.

Among the strongest Democratic supporters of Bush on Iraq is Rep. Tom Lantos, D-San Mateo, a Holocaust survivor who fought Nazi Germany as part of the underground resistance movement in his native Hungary.

"In debating this issue, I am haunted by history," Lantos said Tuesday as the House began 17 hours of debate on the White House resolution. "Just as leaders and diplomats who appeased Hitler at Munich in 1938 stand humiliated before history, so will we if we appease Saddam Hussein today."

Lantos is joined by Rep. Ellen Tauscher, D-Walnut Creek, a moderate who is a strong backer of the military, and Rep. Richard Pombo, R-Stockton, a conservative from the Central Valley. Through redistricting, Pombo's district has expanded to include parts of Santa Clara, Alameda and Contra Costa counties, including Morgan Hill in the South Bay.

Those three lawmakers, however, stand out among a Bay Area delegation that is just as opposed to war with Iraq as it was in 1991. Then, only Lantos and former Rep. Tom Campbell, R-Campbell, voted to authorize President George H.W. Bush to use force to oust Saddam from Kuwait.

Bay Area members of Congress opposed to granting Bush's son the same authority said feedback from their constituents has been overwhelmingly against the war. And polls have shown that there is much less support for the war in the Bay Area than in the rest of the state or nationwide.

A Field Poll last month showed that 58 percent of respondents statewide approved of U.S. military action against Iraq to remove Saddam from power, with 33 percent opposed. But 47 percent of the respondents from the Bay Area opposed the military

action, with only 39 percent supporting it, according to Mark DiCamillo, the poll's director.

“Every other part of the state was supportive. The Bay Area was the exception,” he said.

Rep. Zoe Lofgren, D-San Jose, said she takes into account the feelings of her constituents, but is not limited by them.

“Obviously, you listen to your constituents because you're here to represent them. If after studying and listening to everything I felt the United States would be harmed, I would have to put the input to one side,” said Lofgren, who said her office had been contacted by 22 people in favor of authorizing military action and 644 against it. “But it's very clear to me that doing the resolution the president has proposed is really adverse to America's interests.”

Demonstrating the anti-war bent of the region, the office of Rep. Pete Stark, D-Fremont, was flooded with supportive calls from his constituents after he took to the House floor Wednesday afternoon and blasted what he called Bush's “capricious adventure into world domination.”

“Do the generalized threats and half-truths of this administration give any one of us in Congress the confidence to tell a mother or father or family that the loss of their child or loved one was in the name of a just cause?” Stark said in a speech that drew a rare admonition against personally attacking the president from Rep. John Linder, R-Ga., who was moderating the debate.

“Is the president's need for revenge for the threat once posed to his father enough to justify the death of any American? I submit the answer to these questions is no.”